

IMPACT OF THE FIRST AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR ON THE EXPORTS OF KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

The 20th century war (First and Second World War) brought death and destruction world over. War in itself, though anti-social, engaged the governments with an involvement in War with gigantic effort. Whole economic activity was directed towards war industries. It increased prices and this increase in price level stimulated some industries as a result of lavish spending by armed forces on holidays, especially at various tourist resorts in India and mostly to Kashmir. Also on the other hand, industries which depended on foreign countries for their raw materials and markets suffered badly. Those industries which produced goods helping war efforts were in great demand.

KEYWORDS: Trade, War, High- Prices, War-Goods, Destruction, Impact

INTRODUCTION

Kashmir situated on the fringes of the sub-continent did not remain isolated from these developments on account of its strategic position as well as with the opening of the Jehlum valley road in 1890. It came even more directly connected to the foreign as well as Indian markets. Kashmir that was heavily relying on the foreign countries for its trade had to suffer. During the War periods, the main exports of Kashmir, especially Carpets Silk, woolens, paper Mache, silver- ware, wood-carving and nomads etc. faced a mixed impact.

The carpet industry is said to have flourished for a long time after Sultan Zain'l-Abidin's reign. The carpets of Kashmir, however, soon deteriorated. The modern craze for cheapness spoiled this as well as other works of art. An Endeavour was made in time of Maharaja Ranbir Singh to improve the industry by involving Europeans. The contribution of C.M Hadow to the carpet trade was great. He sent Kashmir carpets to be exhibited in the big Chicago World Fair of 1890. The trade prospered and flourished. The year 1914, saw a great pressure on the carpet industry and as a result it expanded. Due to the availability of cheap labor and better technical guidance by the European entrepreneurs, the carpet industry prospered a lot. According to the Census Report of 1921, the six carpet industries located in the city of Srinagar gave employment to 1342 persons. Women were not employed in the carpet factories. But a good number of women were employed as spinners for these factories who worked in their homes and were paid wages on contract basis.

Simultaneously, Silk was also in great demand in foreign as well as in Indian markets. In 1901, sales in Europe amounted to Rs. 256215 whereas in local market sales amounted to Rs.8698. In 1902, the total European sales amounted to Rs. 266215 and local sales amounted to Rs. 3763. During the following two years, the prices realized in England were 13 shillings and 14 shillings for first and second quality silk or (No.1 and No.2). In 1904,

the factory came to have 10 filatures which contained 1,864 reeling basins. In the same year, silk weaving was taken up on an experimental basis. Although the quality of cloth produced was satisfactory and found to compare favourably with the average products of the looms of Japan.

The year 1925, had been a disastrous one on Kashmir sericulture. During the first part of the year, the prices of silk fell from Rs. 32 to 15 per lb. Limited transactions and low prices characterized the weak tendency of the market and adverse fluctuation in the foreign exchange continued to weaken the prices which did not even recover at the end of the year. Imposition of new duties in the nature of luxury tax on raw silk and silk wastes and dominating uncertainty of the silk market culminated in the unprecedented disaster. The table below gives the picture of the same.

In 1931, sales in Europe amounted to Rs. 35900 and in 1933-34, to Rs. 8000 only. During the year 1938-39, the silk market was unsteady. The prices were at reasonable level at the beginning of the year, but there was a short fall afterwards which adversely affected the receipts of the department. The total sales of the year amounted to about 148000 lbs. of raw silk and about 155000 lbs. of silk wastes. The receipt from sale was 9.15 lakh.

Table 3 shows other industries like embroidered numdas got a great boost before and after the First World War. The export of nomad after being embroidered in Kashmir ran into lakhs in the First World War. The demand for Kashmir woolens increased and decreased in the following manner. The demand of woolens in fact increased due to the ongoing "Swadeshi Movement." According to the available estimates, Kashmir, by the years 1904-1905, 1905-1906 and 1906-07 managed to export woolen weighing in total of 5,146, maunds, 5,819 maunds and 5,339 maunds respectively. Once the movement petered out, the export figure came down to only 3,203 maunds in and around the years from 1913-14. The position of the woolens fabrics exported during the different years of ongoing war becomes crystal clear through the information.

Table 4 shows with the launching of Non-cooperation Movement in 1920 A.D, the wave of boycotting foreign good spread like wild fire. It enhanced the demand for goods in the country. The goods produced by the artisans of country in general and *Khadi* in particular were purchased by the people in great pride. It gave boost to the artisan industries of Kashmir also. The "Trade Reports of the years 1918-41" is supportive of the above truth.

Table 4 shows it was with the onset of Second World War that the descending figures displayed upwards signs again in the volume of wool exports. This can be comprehended from brief information reproduced here.

Table 1: Sales in India

Year	Silk No.1 & 2		Inferior silk	
	Quantity (lbs)	Value (Rs)	Quantity (lbs)	Value (Rs)
1924	69965	1392569	9382	80285
1925	53751	1392569	9382	80285

Source: Administrative Report of Sambat year 1981, pp. 22-23.

Table 2: Sales in Abroad

Year	Silk No.1 & 2		Inferior silk	
	Quantity (lbs)	Value (Rs)	Quantity (lbs)	Value (Rs)
1924	113214	2621850	85595	1758
1925	51221	776160	168354	48399

Source: Administrative Report of Sambat year 1981, pp. 22-23.

Table 3

S. No	Years	Weight of Exported Woollen Piece Goods Including Shawl	Their Appropriate Value (Rs)
1.	1913–14	3,203	2,63,355
2.	1914–15	4,499	3,42,020
3.	1915–16	3,340	2,48,290
4.	1916–17	8,932	6,63,992
5.	1917–18	15,803	8,84,575

Source: Trade Reports of years 1918–1938.

Table 4

S. No	Different Years	Weight of Exported Woollen Piece Goods Including Shawls In (Maunds)	Their Appropriate Value (Rs)
1	1918–19	11,944	8,90,577
2	1919–20	3,855	6,19,339
3	1920–21	3,346	5,38,794
4	1921–22	2,498	2,28,574
5	1922–23	2,440	6,95,959
6	1923–24	3,716	11,04,660
7	1924–25	5,795	17,66,365
8	1925–26	5,128	13,01,226
9	1926–27	1,401	2,07,410
10	(Apr)1927–1927(Oct)	4,456	8,09,822
11	(Oct)1927–1928(Sept)	4,852	8,71,452
12	(Oct)1928–1929(Sept)	9,108	9,27,295
13	1929–30	8,746	9,25,150
14	1930–31	5,301	3,65,274
15	1931–32	7,428	5,20,399
16	1932–33	8,858	12,88,631
17	1933–34	3,294	4,67,170
18	1934–35	11,539	5,95,071
19	1935–36	4,689	4,72,035
20	1936–37	5,021	5,95,683
21	1937–38	5,948	7,21,753

Source: Trade Reports of years 1918–1938.

Details of the Woolens Deported between the Years 1938-41

Table 5 shows immediately before the Second World War, inspite of the effects of the Great Depression, carpet trade was able to keep the looms busy. The cheaper variety of carpets was in great demand. Government encouraged the industry by extending annual subsidy for further period of one year in the financial year 1938-39. During this period, a leading firm introduced several innovations by producing carpets like *Gabbas* and embroidered *numdas*. Another firm popularized the medieval designs in carpet weaving and they did good business in such carpets. Previously such carpets were used to be sold in the annual exhibition at Srinagar.

According to an estimate, Kashmir by the year 1941 produced 2 to 3 lakh pieces of *numdas*, out of which around 15,000 to 20,000 were locally consumed, 50,000 to 70,000 in India and the remaining ones in Europe and America. The later significantly offered the substantial market for a considerable proportion of the total *numdas* produced annually in the valley. The average export charge on each *numda* was rupees $\frac{1}{2}$. Each embroidered *numda* carried a local cost of rupees $\frac{4}{12}$ in retail. An unembroidered *numda* on the other hand, was sold for not less than $\frac{2}{14}$

rupees. In London and America, the whole sale price of both the imported embroidered and unembroidered *numdas* stood at rupees 5/- and $\frac{2}{14}$ respectively.

The Kashmir carpet had the local market available in Europe. It was for this reason that the number and the prospects of a successful operational activity of the looms were directly or indirectly attached with the fate of European economy. Thus for instance, during the boom period preceding the year 1929-30, the lucrative carpet recorded as large as 715 looms actively in operation. The number fall down to a minimum figure of 100 looms in the post 1930. The trade in carpets prospered and flourished until 1930, when the World Depression adversely affected it. Consequently, there was not much demand for Kashmiri carpets from Europe and America. Added to this, world economic event was the great event forming a part of the Indian freedom movement, which culminated in the boycott of the foreign goods that in itself fall badly upon the market of the Kashmiri carpets in England- a reality unhesitantly admitted by a European visitor to Indian in the following words.

If India refuses to accept Lancashire cottons, how can English people afford to purchase Kashmir carpets?

The cost of each square feet was computed then at Rs. 3/- where as it was in $\frac{2}{5}$ in the early from 1930–1934. The following table gives a clear idea about the standard production of carpet industry.

Table 6 shows with the outbreak of the Second World War, the carpet industry received a setback. The demand for Kashmir in making rugs and superior carpets showed signs of decline towards the middle of the year 1939–40, with the result that the labor employed in the industry decreased from an average of 2,000 to about 500. Carpet used to have good demand in foreign countries.

On the other hand, carpet like gabbas continued to make steady progress during the year 1940–41. Improvements in designs helped it to perform well. Gabbas were not an item of export. So, the War did not affect its production prospects. The industry was mainly located at Anantnag. About 400 families, excluding millers and middlemen, were involved in the industry. During the year 1940–42, the value of gabbas produced was estimated at Rs. 1 lakh. The numda industry suffered because of the increase in the cost of production. These felted rugs were originally manufactured in various towns and cities of Sinkiang, mainly in Kashgar and Yarkand and were imported in huge quantities into Kashmir till recent times. The artistic hands of the Kashmir embroider turned it into a beautiful but cheap article of furniture. It attracted the attention of the American importers and the trade assumed sizeable proportions before the Second World War. Later the numda began its manufacturing in Kashmir as well. But it could not meet the quality of the Yarkandi numda. Numda Industry had become very lucrative to the Kashmiri merchants. But, due to the unfortunate removal of the vital trade links with Central Asia during the war, this industry received a great set-back. Wool being in demand for other uses became costly. On the other hand numda were not in demand for War purposes. Increase in the price of wool inflated the cost of production of numdas. So, it became costly at the home market produce. But, due to the collapse at the Wall Street, lot of labor had been released from carpet industry, which got readily adjusted in the numda industry. Thus numda industry had taken birth due to stoppage of numda supplies from Central Asia. When the Leh Treaty Road was closed, numdas being locally manufactured become a profitable trade for the investors. The total production of numdas in the year 1941 was between 2 to 3 lakhs, valued at about Rs. 10, 00,000.

Yet another active art of Kashmir during this period was papier-mache. During the period of War, the number of visitors to the valley showed a marked increase due to influx of army personal, who spent their holidays in Kashmir, the papier-mache industry, therefore made brisk sales and the total value of goods produced increased from Rs. 2 lakhs in the year 1940–41 to Rs. 2.5 lakhs in the year 1941–43. About 600, people were employed in the industry during the year 1940–41.

In spite of the rise in the price of silver, the turnover of the silverware industry increased tremendously. Because of the excellent finish and workmanship of the craftsmen, the demand for the silver-ware increased to the extent that it became difficult for the leading firms to cope with the demand with the existing workforce. The industry employed 1100 workers in the year 1941–43 on the other hand; the brass and metal ware industry did not perform well because the price of brass and another connected material had increased due to War.

Wooden furniture and wood carving, a well-known cottage industry of Kashmir continued to be popular during the War. The industry was able to meet the total requirement of the entire state. The toys produced in some of the towns of Kashmir were famous for their excellent shape, finish and color. Improvement in the designs of the toys was under the considerations of the government at the end of 1943. Wood-caving also was popular and made brisk business at the annual exhibition at Srinagar among the tourists throughout the tourist season in Kashmir.

During the year 1944–45, and 1945–46, war conditions continued to influence the working of the industry in all respects. The department continued to supply to the government of India for defense purposes, practically the whole of it's out-turned. Thus, to give impetus to the local weaving industry, local manufacturers were also supplied with raw-silks at prices much below the markets rates. The out–turn of superior silks was booked by His Majesty government and the inferior silks were sold in India markets. The sales of silk and its by-products affected by the department during the year 1945 totaled 2, 41,759 pounds and the amount received was Rs. 38,33,9415.

These ups and downs in the market continued till 1947. It was in this year that India got independence with partition, and had an adverse effect on the external trade of Kashmir. We see these two Wars and the Great Depression had mixed impact on Kashmir products. Except silk, no product of Kashmir was used for war purposes. Carpet, numda, papier-mâché, wooden work, silver-ware, silk sarees, tepoy covers, woolens, ruffle shawls etc enjoyed mixed demand during these crisis.

Table 5

S. No	Different War Years	Weight of Exported Woolen Piece Goods Excluding Shawls	Their Appropriate Value (Rs)
1	1938-39	35,550 maunds	5,665
2	1939-40	52,062 maunds	7,708
3	1940-41	97,149 maunds	15,080

Source: Bhan R.K, Report on Economic Survey of carpet industry, p.13–15.

Statement Showing the Standard Production of Carpets

Table 6

Year	Number of Looms Active	Average Production Per Loom. Sq. Ft	Average Monthly Production	Annual Production	Value (Rs)
1920	715	Na.	Na.	Na.	180,00,000
1930	725	100 sq. ft	72,500(a)	8,70,000q.ft	26,10,000
1931	100	100sq. ft	10,000	1,20,000	30,000
1932	100	100sq. ft	10,000	1,20,000	30,000
1933	250	100sq. ft	25,000	3,00,000	7,50,000
1934	250	100sq. ft	25,000	3,00,000	7,50,000
1935	300	300sq. ft	30,000	3,60,000	10,80,000
1936	315	100sq. ft	31,500	3,78,000	11,34,000

Source: This Table prepared by author on the basis of Barker, A, Report on Cottage Industries of Kashmir, p.75, and Bhan, R.K Report Economic Survey of Cottage Industry in Kashmir, p. 23.

CONCLUSIONS

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the carpet industry received a setback. The demand for Kashmir in making rugs and superior carpets showed signs of decline towards the middle of the year 1939-40, with the result that the labour employed in the industry decreased from an average of 2,000 to about 500. Carpet used to have good demand in foreign countries.

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